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NEW USDA SOIL LABORATORY PROMOTES SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

WASHINGTON, March 23—A new U.S. Department of Agriculture laboratory specializing in research on the nation's soil quality will open March 27 in Ames, Iowa.

“A major goal at the new Soil Tilth Research Laboratory will be to promote research that is critical to sustainable agriculture and a safe environment,” said R. Dean Plowman, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

He said lab scientists will work on “ways for farmers to protect and improve the tilth or quality of the soil and, in turn, crop growth, soil fertility and ground water quality.” Scientists will be based in an 82,000-square-foot, three-story facility on the Iowa State University campus.

“Our new laboratory will have a national focus and work closely with agency labs across the country on soils research,” Plowman said. Ames scientists will pursue studies on the physical, chemical and biological processes that influence soil quality, he added, while also drawing upon findings from other labs.

He said the research has been given a national priority. “It will further aims of sustainable agriculture such as lowering farming costs and protecting the environment.” Studies at Ames will include the use of crop residues and tillage practices that will save topsoil on farmland.

Plowman has named ARS plant physiologist Jerry L. Hatfield to direct the tilth laboratory with an initial team of seven scientists. They will be joined by about 12 more scientists and engineers as funding becomes available.

Hatfield has for the past four years led the ARS Plant Stress and Water Conservation research laboratory, Lubbock, Texas.

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USDA ISSUES FINAL RULE FOR PREVENTING INTERSTATE SPREAD OF CITRUS CANCER

WASHINGTON, March 23—The U.S. Department of Agriculture today issued a final rule strengthening survey requirements for citrus groves while relieving some restrictions on the interstate movement of citrus fruit from areas of Florida under regulation because of citrus canker.

Citrus canker is a bacterial plant disease that attacks leaves, twigs and fruit of many types of citrus. Two types of canker bacteria are found in Florida nursery strain and the more virulent Asiatic, or A-strain.

“We believe the new rule will improve our ability to prevent the interstate spread of citrus canker, while removing restrictions that are not warranted in achieving this goal,” said James Glosser, administrator of USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

According to Glosser, certification of citrus fruit is required before it can be shipped to citrus-producing states. The final rule requires a tree-by-tree survey, on foot, of all groves producing fruit for interstate movement under a certificate and all groves located within areas where the Asiatic strain of canker has occurred.

“Under the previous regulation, both a drive-by and a walking survey of selected trees in the grove were required,” said Glosser. “With the new requirement, inspectors will conduct only one type of survey, but it will be more effective than the two previously required. This will significantly strengthen our detection program for citrus canker.”

Glosser said the final rule reduces the area of Florida designated as being under special restriction because of citrus canker caused by the Asiatic, or A-strain. The A-strain area now will consist of Manatee county and portions of Hillsborough, Pinellas and Sarasota counties. Previously, it consisted of all of Manatee, Pinellas and Sarasota counties, and Hillsborough county south of State Road 60.

“We will now be allowing ‘dooryard’ fruit produced outside the A-strain area to move interstate under a limited permit to non-citrus producing states without treatment,” said Glosser. “The trees on the property will still have to be inspected. ‘Dooryard’ fruit is regulated fruit produced in groves of fewer than 10 trees.”

In addition, the new rule exempts certain Florida nurseries from inspection; allows interstate movement of fruit if all nurseries in the state that contain regulated plants are not inspected, provided the state prohibits the movement of regulated articles from those nurseries; and lengthens the interval between required nursery inspections.

Glosser said the rule reduces the requirements for movement of calamondin and kumquat plants grown from seeds or rooted cuttings in nurseries or groves outside the A-strain area. These plants can now be moved interstate under less stringent conditions and to all areas of the United States except commercial citrus-producing areas. Budded or grafted calamondin and kumquat plants will be prohibited from interstate movement.

The final rule becomes effective upon publication in the March 24 Federal Register.

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#

USDA ISSUES HANDBOOK ON MAINTAINING RURAL RAIL SERVICE

WASHINGTON, March 22—What happens to a rural area when the trains stop running?

According to Martin “Buzz” Fitzpatrick, Jr., administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Office of Transportation, loss of rail service can have a devastating effect both for farmers and for residents of rural communities. But there are alternatives.

To help shippers and communities facing rail line abandonment, OT has published a handbook entitled, “Maintaining Local Rail Service.” This handbook integrates information on rural rail assistance from a number of sources and summarizes rail regulations as they apply to railroad abandonment.

During the past decade, major railroads have been streamlining their systems to reduce costs and thus compete more effectively, said Fitzpatrick.

“Many of the light-density branch lines being cast off are located in agricultural regions,” he said. “Without rail transportation, the marketing options of local producers are limited.”

In the past, OT has provided technical assistance on an individual basis to rural communities and state and local governments interested in maintaining rail service, Fitzpatrick said.

“For instance,” he said, “in Mississippi, OT helped agricultural shippers retain service on a 24-mile rail line in Itawamba County that was scheduled for abandonment by helping the local economic development agency purchase and operate the line. In Iowa, OT provided shippers information to preserve service on a 37-mile line in Dallas County that moves 1,500 carloads of grain per year.”

Fitzpatrick said the new handbook makes information on this subject more widely available. The topics include abandonments; alternatives to abandonment; and guidelines for evaluating the feasibility of small railroad operations. There is information for potential buyers of low density rail lines who have little or no railroad experience.

According to Fitzpatrick, many, if not all, of the major railroads have programs or specific plans for addressing the issue of line sales. “Many of these carriers have worked extensively with rural communities and shippers to explore ways of retaining rail service in a particular area,” he said. This information is included in the handbook.

“Because rail service activities at the federal and state levels, as well as those of major rail carriers, are subject to change,” Fitzpatrick said, “we plan to update and supplement the handbook as changes develop.”

The publication is being distributed primarily to federal, state and local organizations involved in rural rail service assistance. A limited supply is available for general distribution.

For more information on the handbook, contact John Batson, USDA-OT, P.O. Box 96575, Washington, D.C. 20090-6575 or call telephone (202) 653-6108.

Larry Mark (202) 447-3977

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USDA ANNOUNCES PREVAILING WORLD MARKET PRICE FOR UPLAND COTTON

WASHINGTON, March 23—Acting Under Secretary of Agriculture Richard W. Goldberg today announced the prevailing world market price, adjusted to U.S. quality and location (adjusted world price), for Strict Low Middling (SLM) 1-1/16 inch (micronaire 3.5-4.9) upland cotton

(base quality) and the coarse count adjustment in effect from 12:01 a.m. Friday, March 24, through midnight Thursday, March 30.

Since the adjusted world price (AWP) is above the 1987 crop and 1988 crop base quality loan rates of 52.25 and 51.80 cents per pound, respectively, the loan repayment rate for 1987 crop and 1988 crop upland cotton during this period is equal to the respective loan rates for the specific quality and location.

Because the loan repayment rate for 1988 crop upland cotton in effect during this period is above the established loan rate, loan deficiency payments are not available for 1988 crop upland cotton sold during this period

The AWP will continue to be used to determine the value of upland cotton that is obtained in exchange for commodity certificates.

Based on data for the week ending March 23, the AWP for upland cotton and the coarse count adjustment are determined as follows:

Adjusted World Price	
Northern Europe Price	67.23
Adjustments:	
Average U.S. spot market location	12.01
SLM 1-1/16 inch cotton	2.00
Average U.S. location	0.42
Sum of Adjustments	<u>-14.43</u>
ADJUSTED WORLD PRICE	52.80 cents/lb.
Coarse Count Adjustment	
Northern Europe Price	67.23
Northern Europe Coarse Count Price	<u>-62.98</u>
	4.25
Adjustment to SLM 1-inch cotton	<u>-4.15</u>
COARSE COUNT ADJUSTMENT	0.10 cents/lb.

The next AWP and coarse count adjustment announcement will be made on March 30.

Charles Cunningham (202) 447-7954

#

GRANT AWARDED TO SAVE STORED SEED

WASHINGTON, March 24—Why some seeds lose potency even while stored under the best known conditions is being studied by U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists in Colorado.

These scientists also are studying ways to detect early seed deterioration, ways to restore vigor in seed that has deteriorated and the role seed oil plays in preserving seeds.

USDA scientists at the Agricultural Research Service's National Seed Storage Laboratory in Fort Collins, Colo., are doing the studies. RJR Nabisco, Inc. granted \$300,000 to the agency to finance the research for three years. It is new funding, following a pledge of \$375,000 the company earlier made to ARS and Colorado State University.

Laboratory director Steve A. Eberhart said "seed storage research is critical to the facility's primary goal of maintaining a collection of the world's plant germplasm." Seed samples of agriculturally important crop species at the lab are used by plant breeders to develop crops that resist diseases and insects and withstand drought.

Agency plant physiologists Eric E. Roos and Christina W. Vertucci and chemist Sharon Sowa are conducting the research. Roos said seed oil will be studied because earlier research has suggested that seeds with high oil content are more difficult to store.

"It is critical that we not allow our seed germplasm stocks to lose their ability to germinate," Roos said. "These studies offer the opportunity to better understand seed deterioration and develop methods for maintaining good quality seed germplasm, thanks to the cooperation of private industry and USDA."

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RECORD NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS AID NATION'S SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION EFFORTS

WASHINGTON, March 27—A record 8,200 volunteers—called the Earth Team—assisted the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service in implementing the nation's soil and water conservation efforts last year.

“We want to especially honor these volunteers during National Volunteer Week, April 9-15,” said SCS Chief Wilson Scaling. “We’re in the midst of one of the biggest conservation efforts in history—and volunteers are playing a key role.”

Scaling said that SCS has had a tremendous workload as a result of the conservation provisions in the 1985 Farm Bill, and that the SCS volunteers have helped inform landowners about these provisions and greatly aided SCS efforts to help farmers and ranchers get conservation plans on highly erodible cropland.

The Earth Team was started in 1986. Volunteers range from college students gaining experience to retirees sharing their experience. They tackle a variety of jobs, including design and layout of conservation practices on individual farms, educational activities, and computer and general office assistance.

“Our Earth Team volunteers are an important reason we’ve been able to stay on schedule in providing planning assistance for nearly 90 million acres of highly erodible land in the past two years,” said Scaling. “This year, we have about 40 million more acres that will need conservation plans if farmers want to meet the Dec. 31 deadline to stay eligible for USDA farm program benefits.”

Scaling also said that the number of Earth Team volunteers has increased fourfold recently due largely to two national campaigns featuring a toll-free telephone number to call to learn about volunteer opportunities in land and water conservation. “We had nearly 1,700 calls during the first three months of one of these campaigns,” he said.

Anyone interested in joining the Earth Team should call 1-800-THE SOIL to find out more about soil and water conservation activities, or contact their local USDA Soil Conservation Service office directly.

SCS has offices in nearly every county in the United States. The agency works closely with soil conservation districts to provide technical assistance to farmers and ranchers and others to protect the nation’s soil and water resources.

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SUGARS SLASH CHANCES OF POULTRY CONTAMINATION

WASHINGTON, March 27—Lactose—milk sugar—can reduce the number of Salmonella bacteria in infected chickens by 99.9 percent for pennies per bird, a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist has reported.

Biochemist John R. DeLoach said both lactose and D-mannose, a natural sugar produced by a Mediterranean plant, were tested by adding the sugars at 2.5 percent to the drinking water of broiler chicks dosed with 100 million Salmonella typhimurium bacteria.

When the 10-day-old birds were compared with chicks that received bacteria but no sugars, only 53 percent of the birds on lactose and only 26 percent of the birds on D-mannose had any Salmonella bacteria.

“It’s not only important how many birds had Salmonella, but how many Salmonella bacteria those birds had,” DeLoach said. “The birds treated with either mannose or lactose had 99.9 percent fewer Salmonella than the control birds in these experiments.

“Lactose worked just as well as mannose, and the cost of lactose in drinking water might be no more than 2 cents per bird,” he said. “Right now, if the poultry producer put his birds on D-mannose for 10 days, it would cost him 50 cents a bird.”

DeLoach was part of a research team studying Salmonella at the Veterinary Toxicology Research Unit operated by USDA’s Agricultural Research Service at College Station, Texas. Other members of the team were microbiologists Hilton H. Mollenhauer, James O. Norman, Anthony B. Oyofe and Richard L. Ziprin, and veterinary pathologist Donald E. Corrier. A report on the Salmonella work appears in the March issue of “Agricultural Research” Magazine.

The scientists tested a variety of sugars for effectiveness against Salmonella, including glucose, lactose, sucrose from cane sugar, and maltose, or malt sugar. After 10 days of sugar-treated drinking water, 100 percent of the bacteria-dosed birds on sucrose or glucose were infected, and 90 percent of the birds on maltose had Salmonella, indicating that these three sugars were largely ineffective.

D-mannose reduces the ability of Salmonella bacteria to settle in broilers’ intestines, forcing the bacteria to pass harmlessly out of the bird, DeLoach said. Studies are still under way on how lactose works.

D-mannose is produced naturally by the Fraxinus ornus plant along the Mediterranean basin. The sugar also is known as seminose and carubiose and is available commercially in the United States. A sister

compound, mannitol, has been used for years as a stabilizer and preservative in pharmaceutical products.

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USDA RELEASES COST OF FOOD AT HOME FOR FEBRUARY

WASHINGTON, March 28—Here is the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s monthly update of the weekly cost of food at home for February 1989:

Cost of food at home for a week in February 1989

	-----Food plans-----			
	(In Dollars)			
	Thrifty	Low-cost	Moderate cost	Liberal
Families:				
Family of 2				
(20-50 years)	43.80	55.40	68.40	85.10
Family of 2				
(51 years and over)	41.50	53.10	65.80	78.80
Family of 4 with				
preschool children	63.70	79.60	97.30	119.70
Family of 4 with				
elementary schoolchildren	73.00	93.60	117.10	141.10
Individuals in				
four-person families:				
Children:				
1-2 years	11.50	14.00	16.30	19.70
3-5 years	12.40	15.20	18.80	22.60
6-8 years	15.20	20.20	25.30	29.50
9-11 years	18.00	23.00	29.60	34.20

Continued on next page

Females:

12-19 years	18.70	22.60	27.40	33.10
20-50 years	18.90	23.60	28.70	36.80
51 and over	18.70	22.90	28.40	33.90

Males:

12-14 years	18.90	26.00	32.50	38.10
15-19 years	19.50	26.90	33.40	38.80
20-50 years	20.90	26.80	33.50	40.60
51 and over	19.00	25.40	31.40	37.70

USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service computes the cost of food at home for four food plans—thrifty, low-cost, moderate-cost, and liberal.

James T. Heimbach, Ph.D., acting administrator of HNIS, said the plans consist of foods that provide well-balanced meals and snacks for a week.

In computing the costs, USDA assumes all food is bought at the store and prepared at home. Costs do not include alcoholic beverages, pet food, soap, cigarettes, paper goods, and other nonfood items bought at the store.

“USDA costs are only guides to spending,” Heimbach said. “Families may spend more or less, depending on such factors as where they buy their food, how carefully they plan and buy, whether some food is produced at home, what foods the family likes, and how much food is prepared at home.

“Most families will find the moderate-cost or low-cost plan suitable,” he said. “The thrifty plan, which USDA uses to set the coupon allotment in the food stamp program, is for families who have tighter budgets. Families with greater resources might use the liberal plan.”

To use the chart to estimate your family's food costs:

—For members eating all meals at home—or carried from home—use the amounts shown in the chart.

—For members eating some meals out, deduct 5 percent from the amount shown for each meal not eaten at home. Thus, for a person eating lunch out 5 days a week, subtract 25 percent, or one-fourth the cost shown.

—For guests, add 5 percent of the amount shown for the proper age group for each meal.

Costs in the second part of the chart are for individuals in fourperson families. If your family has more or less than four, total the “individual” figures and make these adjustments, because larger families tend to buy and use food more economically than smaller ones:

- For a one-person family, add 20 percent.
- For a two-person family, add 10 percent.
- For a three-person family, add 5 percent.
- For a fiveor six-person family, subtract 5 percent.
- For a family of seven or more, subtract 10 percent.

Details of the four family food plans are available from the Nutrition Education Division, HNIS, USDA, Federal Building, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

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USDA ANNOUNCES PREVAILING WORLD MARKET RICE PRICES

WASHINGTON, March 28—Acting Under Secretary of Agriculture Richard W. Goldberg today announced the prevailing world market prices of milled rice, loan rate basis, as follows:

- long grain whole kernels, 10.33 cents per pound;
- medium grain whole kernels, 9.69 cents per pound;
- short grain whole kernels, 9.62 cents per pound;
- broken kernels, 5.17 cents per pound.

Minimum loan repayment rates for 1987 crop loans are the higher of the world price or 50 percent of the loan rate. For 1988 crop rice, the minimum repayment rates are the higher of the world price or 60 percent of the loan rate.

Based upon these prevailing world market prices for milled rice, rough rice world prices are estimated to be:

- long grain, \$6.39 per hundredweight;
- medium grain, \$6.06 per hundredweight;
- short grain, \$5.78 per hundredweight.

The prices announced are effective today at 3:00 P.M. EST. The next scheduled price announcement will be made April 4 at 3:00 P.M. EDT, although prices may be announced sooner if warranted.

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#

SCIENTISTS FIND A SOLUTION TO PEACH GROWERS' NO. 1 INSECT PROBLEM

WASHINGTON, March 29—U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists have found a nonchemical way to inhibit mating of an insect enemy of peach trees, thereby controlling the numbers of a pest that costs U.S. growers about \$20 million annually.

That enemy is two species of a pest family: the lesser peachtree borer that attacks the trunk or limbs of the peach tree, and the larvae of a close relative, the peachtree borer, that gnaws away at the base and roots. Their calling card is a gummy, brownish substance oozing from the trunk or limbs of peach trees in the spring.

The lesser borer resides in Canada and the eastern United States; the peachtree borer inhabits most of the United States. Damage is most severe east of the Mississippi River where almost every peach tree over three years old is infested by one or both species.

USDA entomologist J. Wendell Snow of the Agricultural Research Service, led a five-year study of sex attractants, or pheromones, of female borers as a biological control. He said the attractants achieved almost complete control of the pests in several peach orchards in central Georgia. Growers in that state lose about \$1.6 million a year to the borers.

“We found that the mating routine of the borers could be disrupted by filling the air around an infested tree with synthesized female pheromone,” said Snow. “Disruption was greatest when we dispersed the pheromones from the tops of peach trees.”

Snow, in charge of the Southeastern Fruit and Tree Nut Research Laboratory in Byron, Ga., hung pheromone-containing dispensers in each peach tree in the test orchards. “It works like this,” he said. “The insects try to mate daily, from around 11 a.m. until about 2 p.m. for

about two weeks, the lifespan of adults. When the male futilely approaches the dispenser repeatedly, he becomes totally confused and exhausted.”

He said synthesized pheromones from both the peachtree borer and the lesser peachtree borer inhibit mating. This reduces populations of both pests to practically zero. Those female insects already in orchards remain barren, thereby breaking the egg-larvae-adult cycle.

Snow said some damage will occur from mated migrating females from adjacent fields, but the pheromones will affect their offspring.

The pheromone dispenser, which is made of polyethylene plastic and resembles a trash bag twist tie, is being reviewed by the Environmental Protection Agency for commercial use.

According to Snow, research cooperators are evaluating the synthesized pheromones for effectiveness under different growing and weather conditions. Test sites include: South Carolina’s Clemson University, Virginia Tech, Penn State, and Rutgers Research Center in New Jersey.

Information on using the pheromones was reported in the March issue of Agricultural Research, the agency’s monthly magazine. This issue commemorates the 100th anniversary of biological control.

Only two pesticides, Lorsban and Thiodan, are approved to control these pests, according to Snow. “The pheromones leave no residue and are expected to be cost competitive with current control methods,” he added.

“This biological control is a good example of technology transfer that is more effective and efficient than pesticides,” said Snow.

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